

Benchmark Committee

Meeting Summary

January 12, 2000

Adopted (3/13/2000)

Committee members present: Chair Bob Helsell, Greg Devereux, John Kelly, John Rindlaub, Charlie Shell (representing Councilmember Richard McIver), Commissioner Judie Stanton

Committee members not present: none

The Benchmark Committee convened at 3:45 pm at Cavanaugh's Hotel. Chair Bob Helsell called the meeting to order. The meeting summary of December 17, 1999 was adopted. No members of the public offered comments.

Revised Benchmark Formats

Members discussed the draft benchmarks and presentation formats that were introduced to the full Commission that afternoon. They agreed that the work to date captured the committee's intent: to develop a broad, macro-level snapshot to communicate to the public and frame a dialogue about the future. The benchmarks are not measures for managing transportation agencies. Nor do they attempt to benchmark processes such as time to deliver projects. Members agreed that some things they had started out wanting to benchmark proved difficult as the data were not available. The current proposed benchmarks were the result of a push-pull process between what the committee wanted to benchmark and what data existed.

It was also noted that at some point it will be necessary to provide information on what it will cost to get to the benchmarked goals.

Available State and National Data for Benchmarking

Members proceeded to discuss the handouts provided by staff on the following topic areas:

Seismic safety of bridges. The first four pages of the handout showed the status of WSDOT's earthquake retrofit program. In the level 1 risk part of the program, 306 bridges have been retrofitted at a cost of \$35 million, with 5 remaining at a cost of \$1 million. In the level 2 risk area, 31 bridges have been completed and 991 remain, at a cost of \$210 million. The data do not include the Alaskan Way Viaduct at a cost of over \$350 million. Committee members felt that

since the public considers safety its highest priority, the \$350 million should be added to the data and used as a benchmark.

Mobility options. The handout graph, based on the 1990 census journey-to-work survey, shows that in the densest urban areas the share of work trips made by modes other than auto was about 35%; in smaller urban areas it was just slightly over 5%. Members asked that data be obtained for 1980 so that a trend line could be shown.

Kathy Elias described additional data she had researched but not brought to the committee. Mode split data for the Vancouver and Spokane urban areas was not comparable to each other or to the available data for the Puget Sound region. The Puget Sound Regional Council employed a data gathering tool called Congestion Management System (CMS) which was too new to have more than a single data point for most of its measures which include lane occupancy, average vehicle occupancy and travel speed for general purpose and HOV lanes. Most of the data exist only for 1997. Later this year, data will be available for 1999. Committee members asked that it be brought back for discussion.

Freight mobility and trade competitiveness. The graph presented showed the trend in growth of truck and rail car traffic related to container cargo at Washington ports. Graphed with population growth, it showed that trade-related traffic was growing much faster than the population at large. Committee members agreed that the data could serve as a useful indicator of trade impact.

Cost Efficiency. In response to last month's discussion, a graph was presented that showed highway spending as a percent of total DOT expenditures, compared to the national average. Including the state ferry system, the Washington state percent ranged from 85% to 88%, compared to the national mean which had been near 74% in recent years. A member asked what would the implication be of setting a 90% target. Charlie Howard replied that it would put pressure on the already small amount being spent on other modes such as rail and aviation.

Members discussed that this measure does not really say anything about the state's cost efficiency which would more likely be measured as a cost per unit, such as the cost per lane mile paved or cost per transit rider. A member familiar with the highway construction industry said that his information from other states indicates that Washington's costs are no higher than other states'.

Another measure would go back to the cost of administration as a percent of total agency spending. Members asked that these measures be brought back for continued discussion.

Committee members found that the next meeting date (previously scheduled for February 11) would not work and agreed that it needed to be changed. They asked staff to identify and schedule a new date. The Committee adjourned at 5:30 pm.